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## TWELVE WORDS

I even dream of calling you,  
to discuss my options, as it were,  
  
to ask if the pain in the shoulder  
is related to the mass in the neck  
  
which seems less swollen, even though  
it occurred just after the drugs  
  
which may have caused the nausea  
and certainly precipitated the weight loss,  
  
(not that I had any leeway),  
unlike the hair loss, which I agree  
  
is merely vanity in a man my age,  
but it focused on the tracheostomy  
  
which I press with my thumb to speak, but,  
I'm never understood, and yet,  
  
only you come by and talk to me  
without shouting as others do,  
  
suggesting that I am also deaf,  
(which I am certainly not),  
  
so that I must respond by writing  
on this yellow pad in bold script  
  
knowing that your time is valuable  
needing to see many people,  
  
so I have promised to limit myself  
to twelve words each day.

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## TWELVE MORE WORDS

I even celebrated your speechless valor,  
drill sergeant for 20 years,  
  
screaming with fine-tuned cords,  
“eyes forward, chin up, follow orders,”  
  
which you never did, drinking  
gallons of beer, smoking ceaselessly,  
  
until those cords were cut out,  
already covered with cancer cells,  
  
finding their way relentlessly around  
until you were 104 pounds  
  
of quiet fire, reduced to writing notes  
on a little yellow pad with a cheap pencil  
  
without ever complaining about the nausea,  
the mouth sores, the hair loss,  
  
because we had a pact,  
when the mass was gone,  
  
a pact I commemorated in a poem  
called *Twelve Words*—that you  
  
wouldn't wait 3 days until  
your kidneys stopped, your gut bled,  
  
your lungs filled with fluid, so  
I have only 12 more words:  
  
Austin, you son of a bitch,  
did you have to die today!

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